

Village Center Revitalization

Wilde Lake Village Center Listening Session

April 21, 2008 Session Notes

These meeting notes provide an overview of the presentation and meeting discussion. Comments are organized by topic, rather than arranged in the order that they were made.

Introduction

Mina Hilsenrath, DPZ; Bill Mackey, DPZ; Tom Sprenkle, DPZ; Candace Dodson-Reed, County Public Relations; and Jessica Feldmark, Senior Advisor to the County Executive, were present at the April 21 Wilde Lake Village Board meeting. Bill Mackey explained the listening session process and asked the audience questions to elicit comments and feedback. About 50 people attended.

Village Discussion

What Works Well?

Bill Mackey started the discussion by asking the residents to explain what elements work well in the Village Center, what they hope will remain the same, to list the most important elements and to explain how a Village Center differs from a conventional strip shopping center. Elements such as the concept of a Village Green, courtyard, the Slayton House, swim center were found to be important. These elements represent how they are different from a conventional shopping center because they are community gathering areas. Residents hope that the current merchants, such as the barber shop, can remain and that the center will not lose its basic integrity as a retail center.

It is important to the community to keep the current services at the Village Center – such as the bank, grocery, and pharmacy. Maybe it is possible that David's could take the role of and expand to be the anchor grocery store. One resident mentioned they would like to see underground parking. Several people found it important to have "mom and pop" home grown businesses, which give the Village Centers a "unique flavor." Creating a merchant's association might be helpful in attracting visitors to the center. The Village Center needs to become a frequent destination for people to gather. A coffee shop or pub might help accomplish this.

What Changes Might Improve the Village Center?

Safety is an important issue that needs to be addressed. An open layout provides a safer atmosphere and better accessibility to the center. Currently at night it is uncomfortable to be in the center because of poor visibility.

A committee studied the Village Center last year and suggested a plaza to connect the two sections. The center should also be connected to Howard Community College. Residents feel the plan should be human-oriented and that people should be able to walk to their homes and shops. Given the proximity to downtown, it would be nice to be able to walk there.

One resident voiced a concern, asking that Kimco not duplicate what is proposed for downtown. Other questions raised include how the Village Center master plan would be coordinated with the downtown master plan and who would be responsible for completing the environmental impact study. Residents think the Wilde Lake Village Center should be seen as a unit with downtown, rather than independent of

the downtown master planning process. One resident asked what would happen to the Village Center if it becomes a construction site for the next three years

What Land Uses Might be Appropriate in the Village Center?

Moving on to the topic of land use, the County asked what residents felt was an appropriate mix of uses. Most people agreed that balance is needed in mixed-use, making sure to avoid having too much housing and too little retail. Another person felt there should be a strong emphasis on office and retail space.

Most residents felt that there is presently enough rental housing near Wilde Lake Village Center, and would instead like more home ownership. Some people would like to avoid new housing in general in the village center, while others do not want to see anymore Section 8. Some felt the Kimco proposal seemed skewed towards too much residential. Residents would like to see a time frame and a written proposal. Additionally, the Village Board should be able to review as the voice of the community.

What Should be the Process for Village Center Revitalization?

The next area of questions dealt with the “gatekeeper” role that GGP holds in New Town Zoning. Some people felt that there should be a balance between letting GGP control and maintain the vision and letting each property owner decide what to do. Others disagreed, saying the County should not change new town zoning so that an independent owner can make changes independently of the whole planned community. The gatekeeper function makes Columbia unique and removing that function concerns some. It also appears that GGP has very good people making plans, however; it is still unknown whether they can fulfill the role once played by the Rouse Co. to maintain the vision. If they are unable to maintain the vision, someone else must. One person thought that if people truly want the County and the people to be the gatekeeper, we should ask GGP to release all their private covenants.

The next area of questions addressed whether or not a Master Plan should be required before a Village Center can redevelop and how a Village Center Master Plan should be coordinated with the overall planning of Columbia and specifically for Downtown Columbia. Residents felt that GGP and Kimco need to collaborate to develop a plan and that all villages should have a master plan. One resident stated that whatever the process, protecting existing merchants is necessary.

Some residents stated that the Master Plan process should be a specific process with community input. It is important that someone should hold the vision and maintain the overall plan for Columbia and the villages in order to create an integrated plan. The group that is in charge of the process should uphold the “Columbia vision” and the interests of the community. An environmental impact study and independent traffic study should be part of the process. Residents should be well informed on the process. All information should be posted on the County’s and Kimco’s website as well as posted in the village page of the Columbia Flier.

Some residents felt the planning board once spoke for the people, but these residents would prefer to see a panel who is interested in looking at the spirit of the plans, not the numbers. Additionally, more opportunities for design input are needed prior to pre-submission meetings, at which point designs are already completed. Some residents feel that the Village Board, Kimco, GGP, CA and the Village Center merchants should come up with a plan together and then present it to the community. Others would simply prefer to see some type of management component.

